

## **Back Again, Back Again: The Boy That Could Change Everything**

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**Abigail, as the intro:** Hello hello hello! Before we begin today's episode, we have a listener limerick! If you, too, would like a definitely terrible and very silly limerick written for you and read out on the show about an (arguably) pg-13 topic of your choice, you, too, can go to [Ko-Fi.com/BackAgainPodcast](http://Ko-Fi.com/BackAgainPodcast) or click the link in the description to jump directly to the page. This one is for wonderful Nat, about flower crowns :)

*A collection of daisies in line*

*Is sweet but it also takes time*

*For you though it's clear*

*I'll do it my dear*

*So long as you make one that's mine*

Thank you so so much and — onto the episode!

[**FX:** voices chatter in the background. Music begins, a simple repeating pattern, bright and cheery. It is "Nightingales" by Pierce Murphy.]

**Abigail, as the intro:** Back Again, Back Again, Episode 26:  
The Boy That Could Change Everything.

[**FX:** Music fades out. A click of a cassette tape-style recorder turns on, and the machine begins to whirr underneath the rest of the audio.]

We were asleep, Leander and I, back-to-back in our tent for the first time in weeks. A month had gone by, after Callia's birthday, after our success, a whirl of organizing a strategy and organizing what to say and trying to seem like maybe, maybe, we could pull this off. When the Longest Night came again, we were supposed to meet with the laird and all of the others she had gained for our support. We had to find a way to convince them we could pull our own weight before then, and we had to convince them that we could stop being slaughtered when the time came.

So sleep did not come easily sheerly because there were always so many things to do (convince the villages, build our numbers, move around, now, because the steady stream of people delivering supplies and coming to join us after our parade through the Laird's territory and the propensity for that sort of thing meant that the main camp's location was hardly secret, anymore, and that was dangerous to our survival - we had three camps, now, along with the outposts set up around villages, outposts that the kings still hunted), but when sleep finally did come, it crashed into us. This was one of those nights -

Leander, asleep, me, asleep, Callia, still fighting off exhaustion trying to do three more things before she consigned herself to rest.

It was late; it was early. It was, maybe, just after midnight.

Leander woke up. They bolted upright and I stirred to waking beside them, eyes half-lidded, still out of it.

They stared down at me. Their eyes glowed gold.

One hand, snaked through mine, curled my fingers into a fist. They were completely, completely still.

*He's here, they said. He's here, he's here, he's here.*

—

*I do know how this will end*, Leander sang, some time later. It had taken too long to calm them down — I say, *calm down*, and by that I mean, *snap them back into a state of agitation, of permanent movement*, because, for them, the stillness was scary. It took even longer to find Callia in the camp. Leander's fingers were itching, then, pulling at bits of loose embroidery on their quilted vest, but they wouldn't take their lute until Callia appeared. *I won't be able to stop*, they said. *There is a song that's building, there is a song that's building. I will not be able to stop.*

I dragged Iolo and Rhia from their bed to sit with Leander while I tracked Callia down — it hadn't taken her but one look

at my wild eyes, the way my hands were radiation-gold with magic, to drop her plans and come running. Leander had picked apart nearly an entire flower from along their hem by the time we got back, and they scrambled to put their instrument into their hands. *I do know how this will end*, they sang, again, with no cohesive rhythm or accompaniment to the words. They plucked at the strings like they did their clothes. They gasped and choked on the words. *But there is not just one way through to completion. Because Rhysea is not without mercy and it is not without magic. There is more to this story and there are more players still to enter.*

Then they went still. And then they sang.

Listeners, Rhysea is not without failsafes. I should not have kept this from you as long as I have. But - we have talked before about spoiling lives, even if they are our own, our own pasts, and I didn't want to - I didn't want to mention him. Not until I was ready.

After all, how do you make it back to this world from Rhysea?

You die.

How did I make it back to this world?

I died. I - was killed.

By - The Boy.

The long and short of it was - there was an asterisk, I suppose, to my coming. That in case I chose the wrong side, or in case I died too early on, in case, in case, in case - there would be another. Who would come, who would bear the magic, who could turn the world or right it or keep it as it was.

We called him The Boy. The Boy That Could Change Everything.

I say it, again, just as a way to try and convince myself, still, all these years later. It does - it does make sense, because Rhysea is always a place of balance, and for me to exist without being part of a matched set puts the world off-kilter. For just as, by the end, Io stared daggers at Leander and Cassian looked to Callia, with that sure and terrible knowledge that they were competing for the same role and that only one would survive to fulfill it - I mean. Cassian and Io were still down a soldier. And the magic must always balance back out.

That is - that is what I have to believe in, more than anything else. If I am back here, in this world, I have to hope that he is back here, too, that someone killed him after he killed me, because if the two of us, magic, soldiers, were *gone*, then we had fulfilled this story foretold.

That isn't even selfish. That is just - me, hoping, hoping, that my people are okay.

But back in the moment - it was - almost frightening. It was the first time that a vision hit, *hit*, because now all of the major characters were in play and Rhysea was so righted that it could just - deliver shocks to Leander. Make them not just a storyteller, but like the poet of old. A prophet, a prince. It wouldn't be the last of visions - we all got used to them, as much as we could - but they drained Leander, made me wild and Callia anxious. All of us thrummed with the magic, because the Boy had come.

They'd maybe dreamt it, but none of us were stupid enough to dismiss it as a nightmare.

*The Boy*, Leander said. *He will come from far away, and he will be able to take the magic.*

They did not say "wake," like I had. They did not choose "use" or "will have" or "will be able to access." They said, very distinctly, *take*.

Silence. We all stared at them, then stared at each other. Callia hissed out a breath. *Not again*, she said, but there was something breaking in her voice. *Not again. We're so close.*

Iolo, out of all of us, found her head first. *Does he know?*

Rhia blinked, stupified and still sleepy. *Who?*

*The prince*, Iolo hissed. *Cassius Rex. Does he know? Is it in your book?*

All of the pieces came together in Rhia's head, and she cursed, a lovely twelve-syllabled thing that was just as defeated as it was musical. *I don't... I don't know.*

This was not good enough. It was lucky that Iolo had reached that conclusion first: Iolo loved Rhia most, and Callia would not have been so kind in how she asked. It would have been an accusation, even if she hadn't meant it as much. That was Callia's way - pendulum, two extremes, trust and love against the paranoia that had kept her alive. We stared at Rhia; she strung out another curse; she elaborated. *There is a chance it is in the old book. There is a chance - that they faced someone similar, before? There is a chance that the girl we know as the old eligida was the failsafe. There is a chance that only one of the two were found. It was less certain, then. The magic. There was still more of it.*

Callia had stopped listening after that first phrase. *What do you mean there's a chance.*

*It means I don't know,* Rhia snapped. *It means I was still a servant, and there were always things I was not allowed to see. When I read from the Book, it was never without the supervision of one of the kings. I was a servant. It was ancient and precious. I read from copied-over pages unless I was reading beside Cassian - I held the thing in my hands less times than I have fingers.*

*Because they kept secrets,* I finished. A memory wormed in the back of my mind - I'd asked Cassian, once, to look through the book. He'd snapped a rejection back at me with the kind of fervor that didn't come without something to hide. A secret like that - a secret that said, *You have a spare, maybe even a superior, and your contentment here depends on you fancying yourself irreplaceable and a savior* - was one I didn't doubt the price would keep. A secret like, *If you don't cooperate, maybe I will have someone come along and steal the magic from you,* was one Cassian would love. Why would I ever have learned that?

*Ilyaas?* Callia prodded.

*I would bet on him knowing,* I said to Callia. *I could not tell you if he has realized the Boy is here, now, but I would bet on him knowing.*

It was Iolo's turn for a curse, musical and long and harmonic to Rhia's.

*The laerds,* Leander said. Their voice felt disconnected, floating somewhere else above us. *Even Ocella is not a fool. She is optimistic, but no laerd will back us if there is someone else with magic.*

Callia and I locked eyes. I remembered her saying, *there's your danger,* and I remembered the promise I made her and made myself.



He would not back down. I would not back down. If Cassian had The Boy, and The Boy had magic, and I had nothing - we would be right back where we began. And I didn't believe that the queen would let any *vatakina eligida*, regardless of how they looked, slip through her fingers twice. The magic would be enough for her.

*We have to find him*, Callia said.

I still balked. *But if he touches me - he could take -*

She cupped my face, hard, between her hands. *I will not let that happen. If that is what it takes, will kill your Boy.*

I stared back into her eyes. *And I will kill your prince*, I said. *For Rhysea. For you.*

*For Rhysea*, Callia repeated. *For you.*

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**Abigail, as the outro:** Back Again, Back Again is written and produced by me, Abigail Eliza. If you're enjoying the show, please consider leaving a review on your podcast platform of choice or supporting Back Again, Back Again on Patreon at [patreon.com/backagainpodcast](https://patreon.com/backagainpodcast), where you'll gain access to bloopers, annotated transcripts, episode sneak-peeks, and more. If you'd like to hear more about the show, visit us on Twitter, Instagram, or Tumblr @backagainpodcast or on Tik Tok @abigailelizawrites. Our outtro music is Nightingales by Pierce Murphy from the album To Japan, and is licensed under an

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If you've made it this far, thanks for sticking around. Please remember that you do not have to fill your days with action and creation to be worthy of the space you take up. You were made already whole.

The light-soaked days are coming. I promise. I hope you have a wonderful day.

**[Abigail, post-credits]** These bitches GAY